

GODLY DELUSIONS; APPARITION OF THE MYSTIC IN ANCIENT PERSIAN ART AND MYTHOLOGY

Anum Mahmood

University of Okara

Corresponding Author: *

Anum Mahmood

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20458552>

Received 03 April 2026	Accepted 12 May 2026	Published 30 May 2026
---------------------------	-------------------------	--------------------------

ABSTRACT

The following research focuses on the visual paradox in Persian Art. Supernatural beings has always fascinated the art of the ancient Persinate empires. These were portrayed in not only art it also in Persian mythology and Persian folklore. These supernatural beings were considered to have malevolent powers. This paper explores these mystic being, its foundation and its connotation through art, literature, mythology and Persian folklore. These mystic presences have been the core part of Persian manuscript painting for centuries.

Keywords:

INTRODUCTION

Acknowledged to be one of the ancient countries in the realm, Persia was home to one of the original cultures, beliefs and civilizations that were thought to investigate with making art during that time. Early representations encompassed intricate yet complex ceramics and small bronze articles, which exhibited a variability of creative and imaginative styles and influences that were taken from neighboring kingdoms. For long Ancient Persia became the source of inspiration and encouragement for many. Ancient texts, mythology and folklore have held these mystic being for ages. Through rich history, Persia has been a source of fascination for the contemporary world. These manuscripts hold the tradition of centuries old being rooted in rich culture, preserving Persian mythology and the tradition of storytelling, these beings continue to aspire the modern world (Meyer, 2024).

Through the development and transformation of beliefs over time, some myths along with their conforming customs and sacraments vanished. Others persevere, but misplaced their novel

connotations, regularly taking on new ones. As societies progressed, goddesses often transformed into sovereigns, but persisted in the mythological history. Persian manuscript illustrations comprising of these mystic being can often be traced back to the age of centuries old Zoroastrian texts.

Persian miniatures, a traditional custom of painting, often comprised of comprehensive and inclusive portrayals of demons through their complex designs. The origin is difficult to trace, with many scholars dating to the origin with the illuminated manuscript associated with the prophet Mani. The illustrated manuscript is called *Arzhang*, associated to the Sasanian Empire (Eidipour, 2021).

Ancient Myths and Persian Representation

Ancient archives demonstrate the practices of magic were also found in earliest manuscripts from the Arab regions such as Middle East during the time that Islam was flourishing in Iran. These demonic beings were thought to be as tangible as

Paradise and Hell, and so enchantments were believed essential to ward off such evils.

The iconography of these mysterious demons in Primordial Persia was amusing and diverse, carrying a cavernous representation that imitated the standards and principles of the culture (mythical encyclopedia, n.d.).

Spell-casting and incantations

Human have been using spells as means to get hold of an individual. before the dawn of modern knowledge, science, and values around the world castoff paranormal and supernatural practices like spell-casting and chants to get over numerous infirmities. Records says that these old inscriptions were pedantically documented. These were also thought to be a mode for individuals to ward off malevolent spirits (Wright, n.d.).

To actively use these spells, it was believed to have been uttered in a specific manner. Originally meant for verbal transmission, later became associated with an amulet. Both worthless and eloquent verses and terms, as well as numbers, vowels, and definite axioms narrated backward have been observed as mysteriously powerful achieving anticipated consequences (Budge, 1978).

This is observed in pre Islamic Persia, where sources have written that they were used abundantly. One source mentions the use of feather of the *Vārānjina* bird. It was believed that this feather had magical powers and rubbing it against one's body can counter the effects of evil spells cast on an individual. Whoever lugs such a feather cannot be slayed or driven away; he is privileged by everyone, and his opponents tremble before him (Omidisalar, 1991).

Several Arab sources dominates the types of amulets and usage. These amulets were projected to stimulate lifeless matters to action, call ghosts, and govern sprites, rudiments, divine figures, or noxious beings. One of these includes the primitive Persian *komāha* "the amulet worn on the arm" and the Arabic and Persian terms *'ūda* "amulet," *herz*, and *ta'wīd*, although factually denoting to an objects or objects accepted as defense against malicious or harm,

were cast-off interchangeably for oral and talismanic charms. Similarly, decades later in Mughal India, in order to safeguard the reoccurrence or recall of a fugitive slave, a kind of written charm called *gerd-nāma* known as "collar inscription" was transliterated around the ends of a piece of paper. The slave's name was then inscribed in the middle and the paper either placed underneath a stone, buried, devoted to a column in the house. This process proved the comeback of the slave.

Demonology

Prehistoric Persian mythology has always been rich in demonology, through numerous varieties of demons portrayed in art and literature. The earliest texts portrayed these demons as being associated with harmful yet negative traits such as confusion, annihilation, and often associated with sickness and diseases. The iconography of these demons was often representational and carried a deeper connotation.

Persian mythology and art is rich in symbolism. Single mutual symbol used in Persian demonology was the serpent. The serpent was frequently represented as a demon and was associated with treachery, betrayal and enticement. Few encounters also represent the serpent and its association with fertility, renewal and rebirth. Alternative collective symbol used in Persian demonology was the lion. The lion was symbolic to fierceness, controlling and powerful demon, it was usually related to power and valor. The lion was also linked with the sun and was from time to time depicted with wings, signifying its celestial nature.

The scorpion was alternative collective symbol used thoroughly in Persian demonology. The association for decade of a scorpion was linked with loss, death and devastation and was illustrated as being a formidable being with a stinger. In addition to these symbols, demons in Persian mythology were often described with numerous crania or appendages, signifying their capacity to cause disorder, confusion and devastation, that too done on a huge scale (mythical encyclopedia, n.d.). The Persian mythology which thoroughly believe in whizzes

and demons mentions the succeeding through art and literature.

Az and Niyaz

The name of the demons, *Az* always signifies greed and voraciousness, and *Niyaz* always sorrowful, painful, blind and pale. These both have known to be highly destructive and powerful demons as mentioned in the Zoroastrian texts. They believed that *Az* always acted with *Niyaz*. Several ancient religious texts as well as miniature art has discussed the type of destructions caused by these powerful demons. Example of this is from Bundahiin we read: "*Az* is that demon who gulps everything and, when he does not catch something to satisfy his hunger *Niyaz* is believed to have eaten from his own body (Doostkhah, n.d.).

Zahāk

A personification of evil, Persian mythology believed *Zahāk* to transform from a supernatural monster into an evil human being. *Zahāk* has been described in numerous prehistoric texts where different stories and character revolution have been associated to him.

Mehrgiah

A type of plant, used in Iranian art as well as folklore. A type of plant having human capabilities. The myth associated with it says the person who carries this plant shall be loved by everyone around him. This human-like plant is believed to be scared by Greeks, as they call it 'Apple of Love'. Jews and the Arabs believes this plant to be of toxic nature whereas Christians believed that the plants came before human beings and is known to the tree of knowledge.

Khale Ghulak

A folklore believed by the people of Fars region in Persia. A form of supernatural entity that is assumed to cause chaos and disorder by stealing the newborn babies.

Nasv/ Nasu

A type of Deev, having demonic presence attacking the dead bodies causing demonic

corruption. It is believed that whoever touches the dead shall also be contaminated by the *Nasv*. These take the shape of a fly and contaminates the body until the purification rituals are done. These rituals allows these *Nasv* to leave the dead body.

Tirg

A sort of zombie, these *Tirg* would use the dead, sealing their burials with clay and live with them in their burial places. These humans believed that these would take over the dead and tear them with their teeth and no one could help the dead (bahrami, n.d.).

Spazg

One of the negative Deev, comes in the form of a soldier who gossips. It is thought that the person who believed him turns against one another. His movements are never forward but rather walks backwards and stays in hells for the slanders he has done. He is considered to be an ungrateful and unthankful one.

Shah Veh

Also identified as 'Al', believed to be the protectors of women who has just given birth, these were popular in western regions of Azerbaijan. Lamps were ignited beside the bed, knives were kept in the room at night to call upon her.

Aptar Joli

A type of boogie who is believed to steal children at night in the regions of Baluchistan and city of Pehrah. Usually taken the form of an animal who walks like humans, steals small children from their houses and cause disorder.

Xeyer Bar Kar

A type of fairy usually associated with western Persian folklore depicts 'Xeyer Bar Kar' as being angelic being usually in the form of old women or a bird bringing blessings and sustenance. Traditions says that families open their pots so that food can be shared with Xeyer. To welcome her and the blessings she brings, families usually

leave lights on and a door open for her to arrive (bahrami, n.d.).

Hura

A deity responsible for the creation of life on earth. In art Hura is often symbolized as a sun or a spiral form, showcasing the ultimate force and giving life motion. One of the strengths of Hura is his ultimate, yet godly creativity. This is done through inventions, art and childbirth.

Manticore

The Manticore also commonly referred to as the “man-eater” is a formidable creature that has the skull of a man, form of a lion, and tail of a scorpion. It was believed unbeatable since its hide was so impenetrable that no weapon could infiltrate it and it stimulated faster than any other creature on the soil. The gigantic creatures were believed to kill anything excluding elephants. They particularly relished human beings, gulping the entire thing that came their way, leaving no hint behind. It prowled in the extended, uncultured swamps away from cities and municipalities. When somebody in the area went missing, and there was no clue as to what happened to them, it was judged to be the work of a Manticore.

Peri

The Peris are type of fairies, tiny in nature, a winged creature. These are neither good nor evil, who appreciates playing tricks on individuals but can also be supportive. A Peri might carry messages from the gods or, consecutively, trick someone into trusting some falsehood or an absolute lie. They generally appear in traditional folklore as tricksters or pranksters, hiding items or misdirect. In later traditions, these Peris were far ahead raised to being compassionate and benevolent spirits by the Arabs of the Muslim regions, aiding the similar resolution as spirits and angels, carrying messages from the heavenly bodies above (bahrami, n.d.).

Suroosh & Daena

A type of angel that stands on the Chinvat Bridge and Daena. The Suroosh represented by

protection whereas Daena is symbolized by one's own morality. Both Suroosh and Daena supports the dead in their journey from life to bereavement. It was believed that once the soul has left the body, it was believed that the soul would remain on earth for several days, whereas the gods came to a judgement about one's life and ultimate fortune. Once departed, the soul then advanced the Chinvat Bridge which was fortified by two dogs who would welcome the vindicated soul and put-down individuals who were sinful and malevolent. On the other hand, Daena would look for the right soul, that too, usually an attractive young woman while, to the fated, she would seem as an unpleasant one. This leads to Suroosh to protect the soul against evil spell, as it intersected the bridge to encounter the angel Rashnu, who is known to be the judge of the dead. Rashnu is known to decide whether the soul went to the heaven or the hell.

Chamrosh & Kamak

Chamrosh and Kamak are correspondingly enormous birds with Chamrosh being a strength for nobility and Kamak for malevolent. The body of the Chamrosh looks like a dog with the head and wings of a bird, usually an eagle. Chamrosh being a shielding being, defending Persians against external aggressors. In opposition to Chamrosh, Kamak plays specifically the contradictory part, fetching devastation and destruction wherever it is present. It is believed that Kamak is so massive that when its spread wings, it obstructed the rain. This action results brings drought to the land (bahrami, n.d.).

Simurgh

Simurgh also known as the dog-bird, it is believed to be a massive feathered creature with the head of a dog, body of a peacock, and claws of a lion, occasionally imagined with a human face. Simurgh lived high in the Alburz Mountains, existing for a span of 1,700 years before it leapt into a fire of its own creation and died, only to rise again just like the phoenix. Simurgh was thought to possess great wisdom. In early mythologies, the bird is known as Saena, the Prodigious Falcon, who sits in the upper

branches of the Tree of all Seeds and, by flapping her wings, guides seeds soaring to the ground and through the world into the earth.

Gavaevodata

Gavaevodata is the Prehistoric bull, who was amongst the premature conceptions of Ahura Mazda. The Highest God, who is believed to have created sky and then packed it with water and divided the water from the earth. Gavaevodata was so beautiful, it attracted the attention of Angra Mainyu who killed it and, afterwards, it was transported to the moon and purified; from its purified seed came all animals who would feed on, and fertilize, the earth's vegetation. Prehistoric texts also state that once animals were produced, Ahura Mazda formerly created human beings and then created fire, but Gavaevodata remained the original yet unique being on earth (Mark, 2019).

Huma Bird

The Huma Bird is an advanced variety of Simurgh, who was thought to fly immortally above the earth, though not landing by any means. It is believed that if the shadow of the Huma bird would descent upon an individual, that person would be blessed and would stay content all their lives. The Huma was accountable for legalizing monarchy and its image was prominent at Persepolis, the glorious capital of the Achaemenes Persian Empire commenced by Darius I. This bird was deliberated to be the most blessed yet holy bird. If someone tried to kill or even try to hurt it, brought unlimited bad luck. If somebody saw or assumed they had seen the Huma bird hovering above, it was considered to be a great blessing. The Huma would often signify the notion of promotion and illumination. the Huma was thought to live an immensely long life, die in its own flames, and give birth to itself afterwards just like Simurgh and the other Phoenix.

Conclusion

One of the fundamental ideal of primeval Persian culture was a culture of storytelling. Through their rich culture and a strong tradition of

folklore and mythology, they fashioned some of the greatest yet memorable characters, standing for the ideologies of goodness, honesty, justice and order in an indefinite realm, giving individuals optimism and anticipation that these standards would succeed over self-centeredness, brutality, and disorder. The anecdotes in world history which have fascinated audiences from the ancient world to the contemporary times.

REFERENCES

- bahrami, s. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.eranshahr.com/myths/xeyr-bar-kar>
- Budge, T. I. (1978). Penzer.
- Doostkhah, J. (n.d.). MEHREGAN - DEMONOLOGY. Retrieved from <https://fileservers-az.core.ac.uk/download/pdf/229403883.pdf>
- Eidipour, P. (2021, august 24). Persian Miniature Painting. Retrieved from world History Encyclopedia : <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1811/persian-miniature-painting/>
- Mark, J. J. (2019). world history encyclopedia. Retrieved from <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1484/twelve-ancient-persian-mythological-creatures/>
- Meyer, I. (2024, january 12). Art in Contest. Retrieved from <https://artincontext.org/persian-art/mythical-encyclopedia>. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://mythicalencyclopedia.com/demons-in-ancient-persia/>
- Omidisalar, M. (1991). charms. Retrieved from Encyclopaedia Iranica: <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/charms-lat/>
- Wright. (n.d.). ati. Retrieved from <https://allthatsinteresting.com/persian-demon-illustrations>